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ABSTRACT

General Conference Mennonites and Old Order Amish are compared and contrasted in the areas of physical appearance, religious beliefs, formal education, methods of farming, and home settings. General Conference Mennonites and Amish differ in physical appearance and especially in dress. The General Conference Mennonite men and women dress the same as others in society and follow no rules for shaving or hair length. Amish men wear plain colored clothes, and if married wear beards but no moustaches. Amish women wear ankle length plain dresses and do not cut their hair. General Conference Mennonites and Amish also differ in religious customs. General Conference Mennonites have more contemporary religious customs, while Amish retain their traditional services. Both groups, however, avoid lodge membership, drinking, gambling, cursing, saying or signing "I solemnly swear," military service, divorce, adultery, and premarital sex. The educational priorities of the Amish and General Conference Mennonites differ as well. General Conference Mennonites emphasize higher education and attend public schools, while Amish attend parochial schools only until the eighth grade. Both General Conference Mennonites and Amish live in rural settings, although many young General Conference Mennonites are leaving the farm equipment and automated farm processes while Amish farmers use horse drawn machinery and diesel thrashing machines. The homes of the two groups differ greatly. General Conference Mennonites' homes are modern and use electricity. Amish homes do not use electricity and the people use a horse and carriage for transportation. The Amish do not participate in commercial forms of recreation, while General Conference Mennonite young people do and the adults do not. (APG)

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THE GENERAL CONFERENCE MENNONITES

by

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THE GENERAL CONFERENCE MENNONITES

General Conference Mennonites (hereinafter called GC's) live in many states in the United States, such as Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio, among others, possess selected beliefs and values. The writer will contrast GC's with the Old order Amish (hereinafter called Amish) to make descriptions more meaningful. The Amish live in each of the states enumerated above, except Nebraska. Amish beliefs and values tend to be more commonly known in Society, in degrees, as compared to the G.C.'s.

Physical Appearance and Dress

G.C.'s dress basically the same as others in society. One could even omit the word "basically" in the previous sentence. Thus, for Sunday morning church services, G.C. men wear suits of diverse colors, containing stripes and checks. Shirts can be of different colors together with ties that are worn. To be sure, in most cases, careful matching of suits, shirts, and ties will be true.

Young boys will be dressed in a less formal manner with slacks, sweaters in winter, and shirts, all of different colors and designs. Amish men for religious services will wear a black coat, black trousers, a white shirt and no ties. Suspenders worn can be of different colors, providing no stripes or checks appear in

any of the clothing worn. Hooks and eyes, instead of buttons, will be worn on the outer clothing.

G.C. women for Sunday church services will wear dresses of diverse designs like others in society. Pant suits are worn by a few G.C. women. Stripes, checks, and designs are perfectly permissible. The length of the neckline, sleeve length, and bodily length of dress will be like other women in society. Young girls in dress and appearance cannot be distinguished from others of like age, outside the G.C. fold.

Amish women and girls wear plain colored dresses to religious services. The dresses have a very high neck line, sleeve length to wrists, and dress length down to the ankles. The color of the dress can be purple, blue, green, light brown, and black, among other colors.

G.C. men shave, have mustaches, and/or beards like others in society. There are no rules on shaving. Neither are there rules on hair length. Amish men, upon marriage, wear beards with no mustaches. Definite standards for hair length are prescribed and common to all Amish men and boys.

G.C. women have hair styles like others in society. The hair can be longer or shorter, with permanents like other women in rural areas, cities, and towns. Amish women wear prescribed hair parted in the middle and braided toward the side and back of the head. Amish women's hair is long and not cut at any time.

Religious Beliefs

G.C.'s exhibit a wide range of religious beliefs. There are G.C.'s who believe in literal, as well as liberal interpretations of the Bible. Most adults have an excellent knowledge of the Bible. Older individuals may prefer the King James version, while younger persons like diverse versions, but lack enthusiasm for the King James version. All church services are in the English language. Baptism is by sprinkling, not immersion. What differentiates G.C.'s from other mainline Protestant church groups is their opposition to participating in military service during times of conscription for young men of draft age. Alternative (conscientious objectors to war) service is emphasized heavily by ministers and most church members. Government approved projects in terms of civilian service is participated in by drafted young men. Approximately, ten per cent of G.C. drafted men enter military service.

Amish young men who are drafted also enter alternative service, rather than the military. They, as well as G.C. young men serve an equal amount of time in alternative service, as compared to those in military service. Nearly 100 per cent of Amish young men go into alternative, rather than military service.

In alternative service, both G.C.'s and Amish have worked in mental hospitals, doing relief work where refugees are located in foreign countries, or perform work in hospitals, in general.

Amish worship in homes or barns of church members. They have no church buildings. No musical instruments or religious objects, such as crosses, are utilized in religious services. Benches without backs are always in evidence for preaching services. All

services are held in the German language. Three hymns take approximately one hour to sing in somewhat of a chanting manner. There are no notes in their hymnals. Church services are lengthy, such as an Amish wedding taking three hours and fifteen minutes. Fellowship meals are held after each church service. Preaching services are held every other week, alternating with Sunday School.

G.C.'s have excellent church buildings, undistinguishable from other mainline Protestant churches. A cross will be inside the sanctuary, as well as a Christian flag. Pianos and organs are very common. During church services, religious hymns may be played on cornets, trombones, and baritone horns. Choir directors generally are college/university trained in music education. Ministers are college graduates, followed by three years of seminary education.

G.C.'s and Amish frown upon lodge membership, drinking, gambling, cursing, taking an oath or signing a legal document with the words "I solemnly swear," military service, divorce, adultery, and premarital sex.

Old Order Amish have many other taboos, such as using electricity and electrical appliances, including electric ranges, hot water heaters, dishwashers, clothes washers, driers, radio, and television.

Formal Education

G.C.'s tend to emphasize the sky is the limit in formal education. There are medical doctors (M.D.s.), college and university professors, teachers, principals, superintendents, nurses (R.N.'s), business owners and managers, among other professionals

who are members of the General Conference Mennonites. Also, within the denomination are carpenters, plumbers, contractors, electricians, barbers, custodians, and cooks, among others employed in society. The number of people who farm has gone downhill drastically since the end of World War II. The number of young married women who are housewives only, has dwindled to almost zero. The only exception would be if the wife has small children and thus needs to stay in the home setting. There are two liberal arts G.C. colleges in the United States - Bethel College at North Newton, Kansas and Bluffton College at Bluffton, Ohio. Last school year, the former college had three premed students who applied for admission to medical school. All three were accepted. The number of students entering law school is increasing, but is still low in number, compared to other professions entered into by G.C. college graduates.

G.C.'s attend parochial as well as public school. Public schools are preferred, however. Private church related as well as public colleges and universities are attended.

Amish education ends with the eighth grade. Members of the Amish congregation tend to teach their own children in parochial schools. The parochial school emphasizes the four r's (reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion).

The reading curriculum consists of Biblical stories from a reader published by a religious publishing house. Word recognition and comprehension skills are definitely taught in reading. Writing experiences are correlated with activities contained in a basal elementary school language arts textbook, published by a major

publishing company of secular textbooks. Arithmetic is taught using a secular series of textbooks, also published by a leading company. The fourth r -religion- is emphasized in Bible stories read in the German language, as well as from content in the German Bible. Amish children tend to be highly knowledgeable about the German Bible.

Amish believe eighth grade education to be adequate to develop farmers and housewives. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God," according to Amish philosophy. Rather, a practical education is needed. Utilitarian goals are significant.

Methods of Farming

General Conference Mennonites still are known as a rural population. However, most young people definitely leave the farm to seek jobs elsewhere, or go on to higher education after completing high school requirements. Those who farm use modern machinery, if money is available to do so. Thus, a G.C. farmer of moderate or high net value will own and use self-propelled combines with power steering, power brakes, and an air-conditioned cab. Tractors also will have power steering and brakes, hydraulic lifts, and air conditioned cabs. Implements such as farm tillers, disks, and grain drills are attached to the hydraulic lifts of tractors. If laying hens provide income, the operation will be large with 10,000 to 16,000 birds in cages. Six to eight hens are in each cage. The cages are in long rows. Mash (feed) is augerred automatically down the trough for laying hens to eat. Water is automatically provided

for hens. A conveyor belt brings the eggs to where the farmer can pack them in cases. Automatic packers of eggs into cases from the conveyor belt are available to farmers. Those few that operate a dairy farm may have forty to sixty milk cows. Cows are milked by pipeline milkers in which the milk moves from the cow to a bulk milk tank, untouched by human hands. Beef cattle producers have unloading augers on silos which send ensilage down from a tall silo with the press of a button.

Amish farmers use horse drawn farm machinery. A team of draft horses then pulls a plow, tandem disk, a harrow, and a grain drill. Grain is cut with a binder. The grain binder cuts the wheat, oats, or barley and makes small bundles. Each bundle has a string of twine around it. Eight to ten bundles are placed into a shock. The grain points upward on the shock and the strawside touches the ground. Later, the bundles in each shock are pitched by an Amish farmer, using a pitchfork, into a threshing machine. The threshing machine, powered by a gasoline engine, separates the straw and chaff from the grain. The wheat is augerred into a wagon from the threshing machine. A team of draft horses pulls the loaded wagon home. The farmer uses a shovel to scoop the grain from the wagon to a grain bin. Heavy manual labor is used in these different operations. Amish farmers use milking machines, powered by a diesel engine to milk cows. The milk is poured from the bucket on the milking machine into a milk tank. The milk tank is cooled by a diesel engine, not electricity.

Coming close to high levels of automation, but still not using electricity, an Amish farmer may have 10,000 laying hens in a

modern hen house for cage layers. The cages each have six to eight laying hens, arranged in long rows. The mash moves down the trough with the auger powered by a gasoline engine. The laying house does not have timed electric lights which go on automatically in the morning. Laying hens need seventeen hours of daylight to be high production layers. An Amish laying house may then have 22 Coleman carburetors at different places on the ceiling throughout the 10,000 cage layer area. Each morning at 5 A.M. the Amish farmer is there to light the 22 carburetors with a bunsen burner. The fuel used to illuminate the laying house is white gasoline.

A gasoline operated engine operates the conveyor belt which brings the eggs, two times a day, from the long rows of cages to where the Amish farmer packs the eggs into cases. The cases of eggs are then picked up by a buyer and distributor twice a week. During the intervals within the two weeks, the eggs are stored in a cold storage area. In the summer months, eggs need to be cooled and remain cool to prevent rot until they are consumed.

The Home Setting

General Conference Mennonites freely utilize electricity, television, radio, dishwashers, electric clothes washers and driers, electric ranges, centralized heating, and hot water heaters in their houses. In fact, there may be feelings of ridicule if a G.C. house does not have modern conveniences and use electricity freely.

Amish houses do not use electricity. No radio, television, automatic clothes washers, dishwashers, and driers are in evidence.

The home is the center of life for the Amish. Horses and carriages transport people. This makes it difficult or impossible for Amish to purchase commercial forms of recreation, such as bowling, playing pool, attending movies, roller skating, and going to dances. These forms of recreation are taboo for Amish people. G.C. Mennonites participate in the above named recreational activities for young people of high school and college age. Adults basically do not participate in commercial recreation, unless an individual is a member of a bowling league. A few adults have joined a square dance club. With the heavy use of automobiles, it is easy for young people who are members of the General Conference Mennonite church to participate in commercial forms of recreation.

Divorce exists in G.C. communities. Two generations ago, marriages in G.C. communities were stable and secure with no divorce. Members tended to marry other G.C. members. Presently, G.C.'s marry freely outside of their own religious fold.

Amish marry Amish congregation members. Otherwise, they no longer are members of the Old Order Amish church. They are endogamous in marrying among their own church members. Divorce is taboo among the Amish. No doubt, if there is separation/divorce of couples, these leave the Old Order Amish fold. The number of people leaving the Amish is relatively high. There are no exact figures available. The writer has visited with many former Old Order Amish couples who have left the religion of their parents. They quote a 25 to 30 per cent leaving rate.

In Closing

Numerous comparisons have been made of GC Mennonites as compared to the Amish. Comparisons were made in the areas of

1. physical appearance and dress.
2. religious beliefs.
3. formal education.
4. methods of farming.
5. the home setting.

General Conference Mennonites are much like others in American Protestant society. One major difference is in attitudes pertaining to participation in the military during times of conscription. Unlike other Protestant groups, G.C. young men go into alternative service (conscientious objectors) when young men are drafted into military service.

Old Order Amish differ much in all five areas enumerated above from others in society. In physical appearance, it is very easy to identify the Amish from others in society. Their religious beliefs differ much from others, since religious services are held in the German language with no church buildings used in worship. Formal education is limited to eight years in an Amish parochial school. Horse drawn implements are used in farming. The home setting uses no electricity. Tradition is prized highly in Amish society.